

Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee Meeting

Summary

March 19, 2009

Members Present: Jon Lourie, Bob Middleton, Carmen Camacho, Nancy Schwiesow, Jennifer Nettles, Neal Blake, Robert Zeender, Mary Pat Spon, Ernest Bland and Kay Weston

Guest: Robert Hillerson, Alan Bowser, Michael Petty, Laurie Yankowski, Jane Redicker, Frankie Blackburn, Linda Siegenthaler, Gary Stith, Rick Siebert, Steve Nash and Commander Johnson

Staff: Roylene Roberts, Vicki Lockerman, Yvette Freeman and Susan Hoffmann

Welcome/Introduction – Jon Lourie called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Motion: The Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee approved the February 2009 minutes as amended with Ernest Bland being in attendance and for the record the motion regarding the Falklands should be clear that there was dissension.

Chairs Report

Jon Lourie reported that:

- The County Executive recommended Operating Budget was transmitted to the County Council. The Silver Spring Urban District budget is good. It appears we are looking at a slight increase in Urban District funds over FY09. Previously when we reviewed the proposed budget we a 10% reduction was anticipated. The County Executive obviously is aware of the vital services the Urban District provides to the community. As a Committee we need to continue advocating for the Urban District as County Council reviews the FY10 Operating Budget.
- The T&E Committee proposed to prohibit the use of brick pavers in the public right-of-way. The Commission on People with Disabilities considers brick pavers a handicapped accessibility impediment and has strongly voiced opposition to brick pavers within the public right-of-way. The Urban District Committee sent a letter opposing Council's proposal to prohibit the use of brick pavers in public-right-of-ways and share the concerns of the Commission on People with Disabilities that our walkways are safe and do not impede access to people with mobility and visual disabilities. I represented the Committee position at the T&E Committee and was on a panel with Friendship Heights, Bethesda and Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Planning Department.
- The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board issued a letter stating their opposition to the proposed pedestrian bridge at the new library. This Committee has expressed support for the bridge. The Board and our Committee are on opposite ends of this issue and sending a mixed message from the Silver Spring community to Montgomery County Government.

Director Reports

Roylene Roberts, Acting Director, Silver Spring Regional Center introduced herself and reported that:

- The 3rd District Police and other allied agencies responded to the incident on Saturday, March 7 there where no serious injuries reported and 18 were arrested.
- The position of the County Executive on brick pavers is we continue using them in the Central Business District.
- Department of Transportation conducted a pedestrian safety audit of Georgia Avenue from Sligo Avenue north to Spring Street on March 17 and 18.
- County Executive is seeking applications for the Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee. If interested the application should include a cover letter outlining the reasons you wish to serve and a brief resume including home and work numbers.
- A public hearing on the designation of the Falkland Apartments was held on March 10 and the Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee will meet on March 23 to discuss the issue and make recommendations. Thereafter, Council will consider all facts and opinions in the record before making a decision.
- M-NCPPC approved the Project Plan and Preliminary Plan for Bonifant Plaza on March 12. The proposed development is an 80 foot tall multi-family building for up to 72

residential units, including a minimum of 12.5% MPDU's, underground parking for 72 vehicles will be provided and accessed via the existing one-way alley running from Bonifant Street to Wayne Avenue.

- There is no update on a permanent Director for the Silver Spring Regional Center.

Jon Lourie suggested to the Committee that the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission, Planning Department be invited at a future meeting to brief them on the ZTA for Fenton Village and address the number of units per acre verses FAR determination development.

Urban District Report

Yvette Freeman reported that:

- The Urban District report is located on page 14 of the packet. She highlight the paver repairs. We are currently in the process of surveying sidewalk/paver conditions throughout the CBD utilizing a rating system to evaluate sidewalk conditions. Repairs are prioritized according to risk and high travel areas, and we conduct paver's repairs throughout the CBD on an ongoing basis. Several members on our crew have the skills to make relatively minor repairs and a contractor is hired for major repairs. I am glad that support for the paver's repair has come about although I remain sensitive to the community for those that may have difficulty maneuvering on the pavers.

Discussion

- Bob Middleton asked who handled pothole repairs in downtown Silver Spring. In front of the Portico the developer has destroyed the street. Could someone give an answer as to when the street will be repaired?
- Yvette Freeman responded that it would depend on the road some are state and other are County roads. We do have numerous potholes on the street and when construction occurs it complicates things. Regarding the street in front of the Portico please send an e-mail and we will follow-up. For example when contractor come and pull-up pavers to do what they are assigned to do with utilities they finish the job and sometimes they don't. **Action:** Roylene and Yvette to follow-up on the street in front of the Portico.

Library Update

Gary Stith reported that:

- The design contract for the library is not in place but we hope to have it done by April 1. Lukmire and Associates were involved in the preliminary work and they will be the architects throughout the project. They have been looking at conceptual layouts in terms of adjacencies of different pieces of the library based on the final Program of Requirements, (POR). There is the issue of the pedestrian access bridge to the garage which has not been resolved but the County Executive wants to move forward and start the design process. We are working on the process and details for community input and the Department of Libraries is working with Roylene Roberts, Acting Director, Silver Spring Regional Center to schedule these public charrettes starting in April.
- The primary focus of the design meetings will be on the exterior, streetscape and public use space around the library. The interior layout will be presented but the Library Department feel they understand the workflow and adjacencies that are needed inside the library. A decision will be made on the interior based on the experience of the architects designing libraries and the Library Department on how the interior will all fit. The County Executive has made it very clear he wants a signature building in a prominent downtown location and that the library is very important to the community. The first meeting will be on the concept and massing for the building that was already developed and showing drawings of other projects that may help people get a mental image of what this might become and receive feedback from community. We think it is important to discuss Leadership Energy and Environmental Design, (LEED'S) of the building because it affects the design and look of the building. LEED's are a set of criteria for how to build a green building which was put out by the US Green Building Council. We briefed the HHS Committee on the pedestrian bridge and there is a requirement in the Urban Renewal Plan that was done in 1997 and amended in 1999 specifically stating that there should not be any pedestrian bridges over streets and defined the streets which are all around the redevelopment project and includes Wayne Avenue. Council feels it is necessary to go back through a public hearing process and amend the Plan. We have drafted language and it is very specific stating the bridge is being provided for access between the garage and library. People are concern that if we have a pedestrian bridge it

takes people off the street and affects the retail viability and the energy on street level. Some are concerned if the bridge is done we won't worry about pedestrian safety street level and not make improvements at the intersection but this is not the case. For the disabled community and the special resource center in the library for people with disabilities and needs to have that kind of access from the bridge and we did look at other options like on the site, under the residential or first floor of the garage.

Studio Plaza

Bob Hillerson reported that:

- The Project Plan hearing has been rescheduled by Park and Planning for us to make accommodation for neighbors that are not satisfied with our proposed project. The project is large and we are trying to get approvals to allow us the flexibility to adapt to changes in the market. The first element is a new street north/south breaking the block down to a more human scale and acts as a vehicular access and pedestrian access. We have a pedestrian link east/west from Georgia to Fenton, based on community input and Park and Planning we made this area as green as possible. The area right in front of Georgia Avenue is currently a promenade which I am proposing to rebuild and turn the area into a designation and not just a way to get to Georgia Avenue but an active space all the time. It will be an arts information center with a kiosk, lighting above, green walls and artwork that we are trying to project images on. Continuing east it will be like Bethesda Row with all retail, there will be a residential building with the bridge over the top of the retail mures on the third floor. We widen the opening at Fenton Street 43 feet wide as a gateway. Retail will be located on all the streets and there will be public space to activate the community. We are in discussion with Choice Hotel about locating their new headquarters in Silver Spring but if this does not happen it would be an office building, residential and residential and if that is the case the building would be approximately 175,000 square feet office above retail and the residential would be up to 603 residential units and about 61,000 square feet of retail with 152 parking spaces for the public under the building. We are proposing widening Mayors Lane from 20 to 28 feet through the entrance to the parking garage and making it two ways from the parking garage south than it would be one-way from that point north for service vehicles only. As the Promenade passes Mayor Lane we will do special pavers, stop sign and things to protect the area from the vehicles. Another priority is eliminating the dumpsters on Mayors Lane and cleaning up the alley putting in two community recycling centers. They would be designed with three trash dumpsters, swipe card for entering, drain in the floor with a fluke to eliminate odors. We will seek Project Plan approval which will establish the general disposition of the buildings, density in-terms of amount of square footage and height proposed to build on the site which is 90 feet from measuring.

Discussion

- Ernest Bland stated from previous meeting you said as measured from Thayer. This means Thayer is higher in elevation than Silver Spring. When you establish the current height from the higher elevation that means when you get to the lower elevation you can have a higher building with respect to the street.
- Bob Hillerson responded that it is 60 feet from Fenton Street as measured. We will establish our amenity package in the project plan to include public parking, green space, plaza, street between Thayer and Silver Spring Avenue and the walkway from Fenton to Mayors Alley, underground utilities in front of all our properties. East Silver Spring has not approved the project.
- Jon Lourie commented that the Committee took a position last July in support of the Studio Plaza Project.
- Ernest Bland asked how the vendors would take trash to the facility in the alley if it is unsafe. You discussed widening the area to accommodate the entrance and exit but why not widening all the way up maybe with some sidewalks. I conveyed a request through Gary Stith previously to come and further discuss my concern about phasing. Another issue of concern is this will affect the small businesses that historically are there and how that relates in respect to phasing. I understood from the gentleman speaking for you previously at a meeting that when the shovel hits the grounds you are shutting down the parking lot. My request and suggestions to the community is not to do that and consider the impact of parking on the community.
- Bob Hillerson responded that the alley is not safe for pedestrian to walk because it is a service alley. We will have more traffic in the area and don't want more traffic in the

service alley. Bob Hillerson ended his presentation and left materials of the project for Committee members to review.

Marketing and Special Events

Susan Hoffmann reported that:

- The Marketing and Special Events Report is located on page 11 of the packet. The Silver Spring Swings Summer Concert Series line-up has been complete and work has begun on collateral materials brochure, posters etc.

Police Update

Commander Don Johnson reported that:

- 2008 closed with increases in some crimes particularly robberies where up and had the biggest impact. Generally it has not been one trend or area. It's been street robberies primarily in the evening until around midnight. We put a lot effort into it the latter part of January and the month of February stressing this and got the Police Community Action Team, (CPAT) and they were assigned here for a four week extended deployment along with plain clothes team and they got good results. We are working with the State Attorney's Office for prosecution, reached out to schools in an effort to educate students on how not to be victimized and let them know the penalties that can go along with these type crimes. The weekend of March 7 we had 10 robberies and 4 robberies last weekend. Anytime there is an abundant of people gather in an area the criminals have more to choose from. 70% of street robberies do not have weapons but commercial robberies are more organized and the percentage is higher. We will continue to try and suppress these robberies.
- With the budget there will be no law enforcement reductions in Silver Spring.

Concert – March 7

Jennifer Nettles reported that:

- Mixed Unity is a group of teenagers that put together the Stop the Violence concert in Memory of Tia Lam on their own with guidance from non-profit groups. They had numerous preparation meetings with some of our staff, police and various other non-profit groups. 7,000 people attend the concert and it went well until the last half-hour when a fight broke out in front of the stage area and immediately after that another fight broke out by McGinity's, 18 people both local and non-local were arrested. Security stop the fights, the police arrived cleared the street and did a tremendous job. We are concerned because we have been working hard in downtown Silver Spring not to have fights on the plaza. The following Monday we convened with the non-profit group, teenagers, Police and County Staff to discuss the pros and cons of the event. From that discussion we formed two groups, the first is the police and security that will discuss what happened and what can be done to eliminate this happening again. They are also looking at other communities this summer will be cutting their free events due to finances and we are expecting more people in downtown Silver Spring. The second group is an events planning group that is specifically working with Mixed Unity and others in looking at how we do events in the future. We volunteered to meet with Seven Oaks on April 7 and hope to have more information for them after the two groups meet. We have made a decision to end our events at 8:30 p.m.
- Richard Jaeggi, Gandhi Brigade, stated Mixed Unity is a group of teenagers that wanted to do something positive in the community and came up with the idea to have a Stop the Violence concert as previously described. When you have a concert to stop violence and it ends in violence it is highly disappointing especially since they put their all into it. I am glad that weapons were not involved and there were no injuries. Mixed Unity is determined to work with the County and downtown Silver Spring and residents to help make downtown safe.
- Commander Johnson stated most of those arrested at the concert on March 7 were charged with disorderly conduct or second degree assault.
- Jon Lourie stated that there is a larger issue not connected with the Mixed Unity concert and don't want this occurrence to stop us from planning other types of activities for our youth. I am concerned about this summer and what we can do as a community in terms of the short term discussions.
- Jane Redicker stated that the Chamber has not discussed youth activities because it is not the Chamber's mission. What we can do as the Chamber is get the word out that people have summer jobs available.

- Frankie Blackburn, Impact Silver Spring stated that she thought they needed to continue looking for places and keep an open dialogue to come up with ideas for other youth activities.
- Ernest Bland stated he was concerned about what we are doing on this Committee and how can we influence the things we are discussing. How come nobody thought about the intensity of the culture we have in developed in downtown Silver Spring? Why is it that we can not have some influence in directing how these projects are developed and phased so they flow with the crowds we are going to have a big problem as the weather becomes warmer. The culture that has been developed in downtown Silver Spring is not just restaurants and shops its activities, its alive, its streetscape and everybody like it.
- Jon Lourie stated that the Regional Center Director and others need to address this issue. There is a tremendous amount of investment in downtown Silver Spring in terms of its renovation. I look at Hillerson project as a rejuvenation of Fenton Village area.
- Ernest Bland stated he is discussing the urban design part having, the urban streetscape, urban environment and we need people to have retail succeed
- Bob Middleton stated the Committee needs to sit down and do some fine tuning. As you may recall we glossed over the idea of having a retreat but needed to have one for the new members coming on the Committee and that would have been an excellent time to fine tune our direction.
- Jon Lourie commented that a retreat should be scheduled.
- The Regional Center needs to be involved in this issue (youth) and come up with ideas of what to do to help engage youth in a positive way especially on weekends during the summer. We recognize we won't have the turf or future Veteran Plaza for another year and there is real concern about having a relief valve. We will have more bodies in a confined area and it is putting a lot of pressure on downtown Silver Spring Management and they have stepped up to the plate in terms of their security and done a great job. We do the summer concert series with the idea of drawing everyone across our community to downtown Silver Spring. The amount of youth we have congregating in downtown Silver Spring is something we need to address.
- Nancy Schwiesow asked if there is a way to have a youth representative on this Committee either appointed or not appointed by the County Executive. I think it would be appropriate for us to have some interaction from someone from the other generation.
- Jon Lourie responded we are legislatively defined in terms of our membership.
- Roylene Roberts responded that the Regional Center staff is already participating in meetings with Jennifer Nettles and others on youth issues.
- Frankie Blackburn stated she would like to see a vision come out of the group. What does a downtown look like that works for youth and adults? We created a great vision for downtown retail ten years ago but don't have a common vision for many fronts in our community and we are seeing the piper pay a huge price. I was on the Redevelopment Committee and we never once discussed incorporating youth in downtown Silver Spring. We need to make up for lost time so there is a vision piece here and an operational piece that Jennifer Nettles is out in front with. The Regional Center and a group like yours can go back and create that positive constructive vision and learn from, best practices around the Country and how others have dealt with this situation.
- Jon Lourie stated we need to move forward with this discussion and figure out the appropriate action.
- Bob Middleton asked Frankie Blackburn, Impact Silver Spring if she would be involved with the Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee Retreat.
- Richard Jaeggi announced that Mixed Unity meets every Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. at City Place Mall, 4th floor, Gandhi Brigade, Media Center if anyone from the Urban District would like to attend.

Jon Lourie announced the following:

- The Budget Review is postponed until the April Meeting.
- The Committee needs to further discuss the Hillerson Project because it goes before the Planning Board on April 30 and perhaps we can do this via e-mail.
- A Retreat does need to be scheduled and I will need to know Committee members availability. I will explore the facilitator with Roylene Roberts.

Meeting adjourned

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